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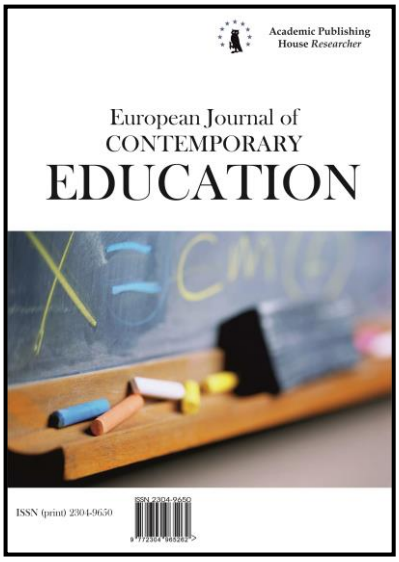

Public Education in the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century

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Abstract

The paper reviews primary education in the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century. It focuses on describing the successes and shortcomings of the public education system, as well as identifying the causes of its poor efficiency.

As a summary, the authors concluded that the government of the Russian Empire consolidated major efforts to improve public education since the mid-19th century. At the same time, it is important to note that the government was not only committed to educating the population, but it also prioritized the role of parochial schools in the process, which paid much more attention to the spiritual and moral component. This is why significant numbers of parochial schools were opened across the Russian Empire, and the institutions enjoyed funding from the state treasury. On the other hand, schools in the system of the Ministry of Public Education, as well as zemstvo (zemstvo – an elective council responsible for the local administration of a provincial district in czarist Russia) and city schools financed by these communities, grew at a much less marked rate. In general, by the end of the 19th century, Russia achieved the encouraging progress in public education, and the transition to universal education was only a matter of time.

Keywords: public education, Russian Empire, the end of the 19 century, parochial schools, public schools, literacy schools.

1. Introduction

At the end of the 19th century, the system of public education was represented by general and technical (vocational) types. Each of them included primary, secondary and higher education. However, the term “public education” was more relevantly used for general primary education. Public education made a rapid advance in the European states in the 19th century. At its heart, the

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phenomenon relied on the principles of general availability, compulsory attendance and free-of-charge basis.

It is important to note that endeavors to implement these principles faced considerable difficulties. For example, ensuring availability required creating a sufficient number of public schools and efficient development of the school network. Providing the population with schools, as well as their optimal territorial distribution implied active involvement of the government and significant allocations from the state budget. In terms of the laws, the government delegated the task of organizing the appropriate number of schools to self-governing communities. This responsibility was placed on communities in countries such as Austria, Hungary, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and others.

Speaking of compulsory public education, European countries widely used coercive measures in the 19th century as economic incentives were not enough to bring the principle to life. Already in the middle of the 19th century, it was found out that to make public education universal, children should be taught on a compulsory basis. It is essential that the economic conditions in which the vast majority of the population lived in Europe brought about the use of such practices as child labor which was very cheap. European countries took into account that in the matter of public education they could not rely on adults caring about their children, and this dictated that public education should be recognized as a compulsory practice. By the end of the 19th century, this approach was accepted virtually by all European countries. However, this was preceded by years of efforts by entire generations of intellectuals. In the USA, they saw a similar situation. It first introduced compulsory public education in Massachusetts in 1856, then in Colombia in 1863, and by 1892, compulsory education for children was made a law already in 27 states.

An important driver contributing to the spread of public education was its free nature. By the end of the 19th century, the system of compulsory public education provided that school fees were taxes imposed by the state along with the personal obligation of giving education to children. The practice of levying school fees as a tax could not be justified in any way. In this context, public education was declared compulsory as it constituted a state need, rather than that of parents or educators. This created conditions for the wide distribution of public education in many civilized countries. By the end of the 19th century, education was free in many countries across the world, namely: Switzerland, France, Russia, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Norway, Bulgaria, Serbia, Germany, USA and others. School fees were collected in Prussia for a long time, but the country also abolished them by 1889. At the same time, the UK had no free education, but, in fact, its primary school could be considered almost free thanks to parliamentary subsidies granted only to the schools that took no fees.

2. Materials and methods

The materials used include pre-revolutionary statistical data collected by departments and ministries, reference literature, as well as academic studies and dissertations, which addressed issues of public education in Russia at the end of the 19th century.

3. Discussion

In the post-Soviet period, academic interest in the history of pre-revolutionary public education increased significantly. Various research works were published, which studied the role of: the Ministry of Public Education (Myatnikov, 2005; Appoeva, 2008; Zhegulskaya, 2008; Cherkasov, 2011; Ovchinnikov, 2006) and Most Holy Synod (Cherkasov, Smigel, 2016) in the field of primary education. The works (Shevchenko et all., 2016; Kazakova, 2009) put specific emphasis on the development of primary education and teaching staff in various governorates of the Russian Empire. The authors of these studies published significant statistical materials, reports, findings of the Russian Imperial Census of 1897, which reflected the issues related to the literacy of the population. Speaking of pre-revolutionary studies, we should mention the work by N. Andreev (Andreev, 1916).

4. Results

The issues of public education were systematically addressed in Russia since Peter the Great. It is known that the reform-minded tsar aimed to make professional knowledge and skills more available for people. For example, the Emperor ordered to open the so-called numbers schools

(tsifirnye shkoly) in 1714, which offered strictly technical programs. General primary education was of little interest to Peter the Great, but he laid the foundation for its further progression. There were also efforts to act on issues of public education during the reign of Empress Catherine II. For example, a project for public school organization was developed in 1770. The framework was provided by the Prussian experience. However, the project was never put into operation. The Russian Empire embarked on its own journey and chose not to adopt the European practices. As a result, the reign of Emperor Alexander I established parochial schools in 1803. According to the law, the obligation of maintaining schools was imposed on local communities and their funds. This resulted into a passive attitude to the idea of launching parochial schools. By 1828, there were only about 600 such schools in the Russian Empire. The process of creating schools in Russia continued under Emperor Nicholas I. As a consequence, by 1853, villages of state peasants ran 272 schools, and villages of appanage (udelnye) peasants – 204 schools, with a total of more than 146,000 students (Bol'shaya entsiklopediya, 1904: 262).

The Zemstvo and Municipal Reforms in the era of Emperor Alexander II called on society to play a role in local self-governing, including the development of the public education system. With self-governing capabilities, localities and cities created public schools (narodnye uchilishcha) designed in line with a more Europeanized model than parochial schools.

Nevertheless, by the end of the century, despite the efforts, the Russian Empire was still very far from its stated ideal – universal primary education. A confirmation is provided by the census of 1897 that showed that only 13% of the population could write and do basic arithmetic.

The situation was brought about by multiple reasons, such as very poor availability, optional attendance and a paid basis (here it is necessary to make a reservation that parochial schools charged no money for teaching – Auth.). We can refer to statistical data published in Russia at the end of the 19th century, which revealed the insufficient number of primary educational institutions. It is known that children of school age (that is children aged between 7 and 11 years) accounted for 11 % of the total Russian population. But still the ratio of the children who received primary education to the entire population did not exceed 3 % (Oldenburg, 1992: 24), while the USA had 22 %, Switzerland – 19 %, Germany – 18 %, etc. The high percentages are linked with longer school ages in the countries. Hence, at the end of the 19th century, about 8 % of children, namely 9.5 million people, did not attend school. Discouraging statistics was also collected among recruits to the armed forces of the Russian Empire. For example, at the end of the 19th century, the percentage of illiterate recruits from the European Russia reached 69 %, while there were no illiterate recruits in Saxony and Bavaria, 1 % – in Prussia and 4.4 % – in France. This certainly did not mean that these people remained illiterate when they left the army after their service. Recruit training was carried out by army officers starting from the 1860's (Natolochnaya et al., 2018: 226-227).

The key factor behind inadequate literacy among children was unavailability of schooling, due insufficient number of schools and their unbalanced distribution throughout the country. Public education was the responsibility of two authorities: the Ministry of Public Education and the Most Holy Synod. The Ministry of Public Education ran three types of schools: ministerial schools and schools of self-governing zemstvo and city communities.

Speaking of the schools managed by the Most Holy Synod, their number in the zemstvo and 13 non-zemstvo governorates amounted to 4,521 in 1882, 11,693 – in 1884, 21,840 – in 1890 and 36,635 – in 1898. Moreover, as the number of parochial schools grew, they enjoyed increasingly larger amounts allocated from the state treasury. In 1886, the state allocated 120 thousand rubles, in 1895 – 3.279 million rubles, in 1897 – 5 million rubles, and in 1900 – more than 6.5 million rubles (Bol'shaya entsiklopediya, 1904: 262). Having succeeded to the throne, Nikolay II ordered to inspect the condition of the education system in the country, which was fulfilled in 1894 by the Literacy Committee. The inspection showed that at that time primary training schools and literacy schools numbered 60,592 with 2,970,066 students (Cherkasov, 2011: 139).

The growth of ministerial schools, supported by the ministerial budget, was far more modest. In 1866, the Ministry spent 1.418 million rubles on public education, which accounted for 20.8 % of its budget. In 1897, the figure was 3.738 million rubles or 14 % of the budget. Zemstvo schools, in turn, spent 738 thousand rubles or 5 % of their budget in 1868, and 8.3 million or 14.8 % of the budget – in 1895. Public education expenditure of cities accounted for 580 thousand rubles or 3 % of the budget in 1871 and 5.181 million or 8.25 % of the budget in 1894 (Bol'shaya entsiklopediya, 1904: 262).

The activities channeled into public education by zemstvos significantly broadened after the Zemstvo Reform of 1890. Until the 1890's, the development of the school network was an exclusive responsibility of uezd (an administrative subdivision, a district) zemstvos. The funding of provincial zemstvos only used to support teachers' training colleges, museums and other auxiliary institutions. In this environment, the satisfaction of the local demand for schools could not but vary in different uyezds. More prosperous uyezds built many schools, while others had to build few. Since the 1890's, provincial zemstvos committed themselves to the efficient development of the school network. With the funds of provincial zemstvos, the rest of the uyezds started to launch new schools.

Intense debate on the introduction of compulsory primary education in Russia began already in the 1860's. For example, the Moscow, Chernigov, Tsaritsyn, Vladimir, Olonets and a number of other provincial zemstvos advocate compulsory primary education. A massive flow of corresponding requests were sent to St. Petersburg. The Ministry of Public Education started to consider the idea and was inclined to implement it. Projects for public schools of 1861 and 1871 proposed a series of steps to gradually make compulsory education a reality. Importantly, in 1877, the ministry forwarded a request to public schools principals to consider the possibility of introducing compulsory education, and out of 38 directors, 30 answered that they welcomed the idea. Most principals promoted the step-by-step introduction of compulsory education, with the gradual increase in primary schools in governorates. For example, the report by the Minister of Public Education for 1884, submitted to Emperor Alexander III, said that it was impossible to introduce compulsory education at this time. Meanwhile, there was little doubt that even with a sufficient number of schools, universality could only be achieved without the compulsory basis. A work, titled "Literacy among school-age children in the Moscow and Mozhaysk uezds of the Moscow governorate" (Gramotnost, 1894) by Bogolepov, cited numerous facts that even if a region had enough schools, children did not attend them because they were used in agriculture operations, and their parents took a negative attitude towards schooling. The first reason accounted for 19.1 % of non-attendances, and the second one – 12.4 % of the total number of non-attendances (Gramotnost', 1894).

We should understand that the Russian intelligentsia also kept track of foreign practices used to bring universal education. For example, the UK introduced compulsory education in 1870, France – in 1882 and the United States at the turn of 20th century.

The arrival of general schooling in the Russian Empire was largely hampered by the paid basis of education. According to the applicable laws, primary education was not free, rather institutions and persons, which ran schools, were given the right to charge or not charge school fees. We should explain that Russia's public school budget amounted to about 25 million rubles at the end of the 19th century, and school fees had a minor share in it. In the total spending of all departments for public education, the school fees accounted for less than 1.5 million rubles, or 5.6 % of the budget. In other words, it was quite possible to switch to free education already at the end of the 19th century, especially considering the financial insecurity of peasants and insufficient comprehension among them of the essential role of schooling.

A few words should also be said about extracurricular education. Extracurricular education was a significant element as it helped to strengthen and enhance the knowledge that pupils received at school. Key measures for extracurricular education included: free libraries and reading rooms, free books handed out by zemstvos to the population, activities to arrange book trade in uezds, public Sunday readings with "magic lanterns"* and images as well as issuing the people's newspaper by zemstvos.

So, by the end of the 19th century, the system of public education was represented by ministerial and parochial schools. The schools of the first type were headed by the Ministry of Public Education which had the Education Committee to handle pedagogical matters. The Russian Empire was divided into 12 educational districts which did not include the Irkutsk, Turkestan and Amur governorates general. Each district was managed by a curator who supervised the principal and inspectors of public schools. In addition, supreme supervision over schools performance in a governorate was by law given to the governor. Schools that existed on the basis of the Regulations of 1874 were run by governorate and uezd school boards chaired by marshals of nobility. In this regard, the school boards had a special position in the structure of mixed offices: the governorate

* It refers to cinematography.

office was usually chaired by the governor and uezd offices only – by marshals of nobility, and here both governorate and uezd councils were headed by marshals of nobility. This can explain the then general tendency – to prioritize the role of the nobility in public education. The district school board included: an inspector of public schools, one representative from the Ministry of Public Education, one from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, one from the diocesan administration (Most Holy Synod), 2 members from the uezd zemstvo assembly and 1 member from the city duma (city council) (if the city sponsors schools). The governorate school board included: a principal of public schools, representatives from the same three bodies, 2 members from the governorate zemstvo assembly and 1 member from the city duma.

The general type of schools was determined by the Regulations of the Primary Public Schools dated May 25, 1874. It was a basic law for the system of public education. It is important to say that this law provided procedures and guidance for zemstvo and city communities in the matters of public education. According to the Regulations of 1874, zemstvo and city public schools could be established by individual societies and private individuals at their discretion by means of donations. These fund allocations were reflected in the optional expenses in the zemstvo and city budgets, but once a school was founded, the costs of its operation became obligatory. The right to close a school was owned by the school council, while a temporary closure by the inspector of public schools. The rights, which belonged to the self-governing offices in public school education, were formulated very vaguely in the Regulations of 1874. As an example, the zemstvo, which financed schools, had the right to elect a curator to control the expenditure. Further, the founder of the school had the right to recommend teaching staff, but it was ultimately approved by the administrative department which could also dismiss teachers.

In addition to the schools operating on the Regulations of 1874, there were uezd schools that functioned on the basis of the Charter of 1828. These schools were state-owned. They were opened using donations of private individuals and societies with subsidies from the Ministry of Public Education. Neither private individuals, nor societies could take part in the school management.

A similar administrative regime was also in place in city schools that operated under the Charter of 1872[*]. With the Charter of 1872, the government tried to bridge the gap between lower and secondary education by extending the schooling period to 6 years; a type of lower school is created, close to the secondary type.

Parochial schools functioned based on the Regulations of 1884. After 1884, a series of new legislative acts were adopted. For example, 1885 saw a special school council established at the Most Holy Synod, 1888 – uezd branches of diocesan school councils, 1891 – the law on literacy schools, 1896 – the Regulations on the administration of parochial schools and literacy schools.

Here is a basic description of the parochial school organization. The system had the Most Holy Synod at its top, which managed the School Council, consisting of persons appointed by the Most Holy Synod. In the dioceses, the school business was led by a bishop with a diocesan school council that included persons appointed by the bishop, so that no secular persons could by law be a member of the school council. Even zemstvo representatives could only be present if invited. In addition, there were uezd branches of diocesan school boards and monitors of parochial schools appointed by the bishop. Church schools were of two types: parochial schools with a 2–3 year course and literacy schools. Originally, the length of the course in parochial schools was specified at 2 years, and this was viewed as an advantage over zemstvo schools with their three-year term of study. However, in 1898, a special meeting at the Most Holy Synod recognized the need to extend the course to 3 years. Literacy schools had a one-year course in place.

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, it is necessary to point out that the government of the Russian Empire consolidated major efforts to improve public education since the mid-19th century. At the same time, it is important to note that the government was not only committed to educating the population, but prioritizing the role of parochial schools in the process, which paid much more attention to the spiritual and moral component. This is why significant numbers of parochial schools were opened across the country, and the institutions enjoyed funding from the treasury. On the other hand, schools in the system of the Ministry of Public Education, as well as zemstvo

[*] According to the Charter, most uezd schools were transformed into city schools.

(zemstvo – an elective council responsible for the local administration of a provincial district in czarist Russia) and city schools financed by these communities, grew at a much less marked rate. In general, by the end of the 19th century, Russia achieved the encouraging progress in public education, and the transition to universal education was only a matter of time.

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